

## Canadian Military History

---

Volume 21 | Issue 1

Article 4

---

4-16-2015

# Not So Black and White Black Canadians and the RCAF's recruiting policy during the Second World War

Simon Theobald

---

### Recommended Citation

Simon Theobald () "Not So Black and White Black Canadians and the RCAF's recruiting policy during the Second World War," *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 21: Iss. 1, Article 4.  
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol21/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian Military History by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).

# Not So Black and White

## Black Canadians and the RCAF's recruiting policy during the Second World War

Simon Theobald

Alan Bundy of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, first tried to enlist with the air force in nearby Halifax in 1939. While his best friend, who had similar credentials but happened to be white, was accepted, Bundy was not. His rejection on racial grounds was a bitter experience, but he remained determined to join the air force. In fact, over the next two years he ignored the National Resources Mobilization Act notices to train with the army, a decision that prompted an RCMP officer to visit his home. Bundy's explanation for refusing to respect his notice was that "I had gone to join the air force in 1939 and if the bullet that kills me is not good enough for the air force then it's not good enough for the army, either." Shortly after the visit to his home, Bundy went back to the Halifax recruiting station in 1942 to try his luck with a new commanding officer. He subsequently became one of the few blacks to be accepted for aircrew training.<sup>1</sup> Bundy was sent to Ontario to train as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) and arrived overseas where he joined No.404 (Buffalo) Squadron in September 1944. While he proved his ability as a multi-engine pilot during operational training in Canada and Britain, white navigators refused to fly with him. With the prospect that Bundy would

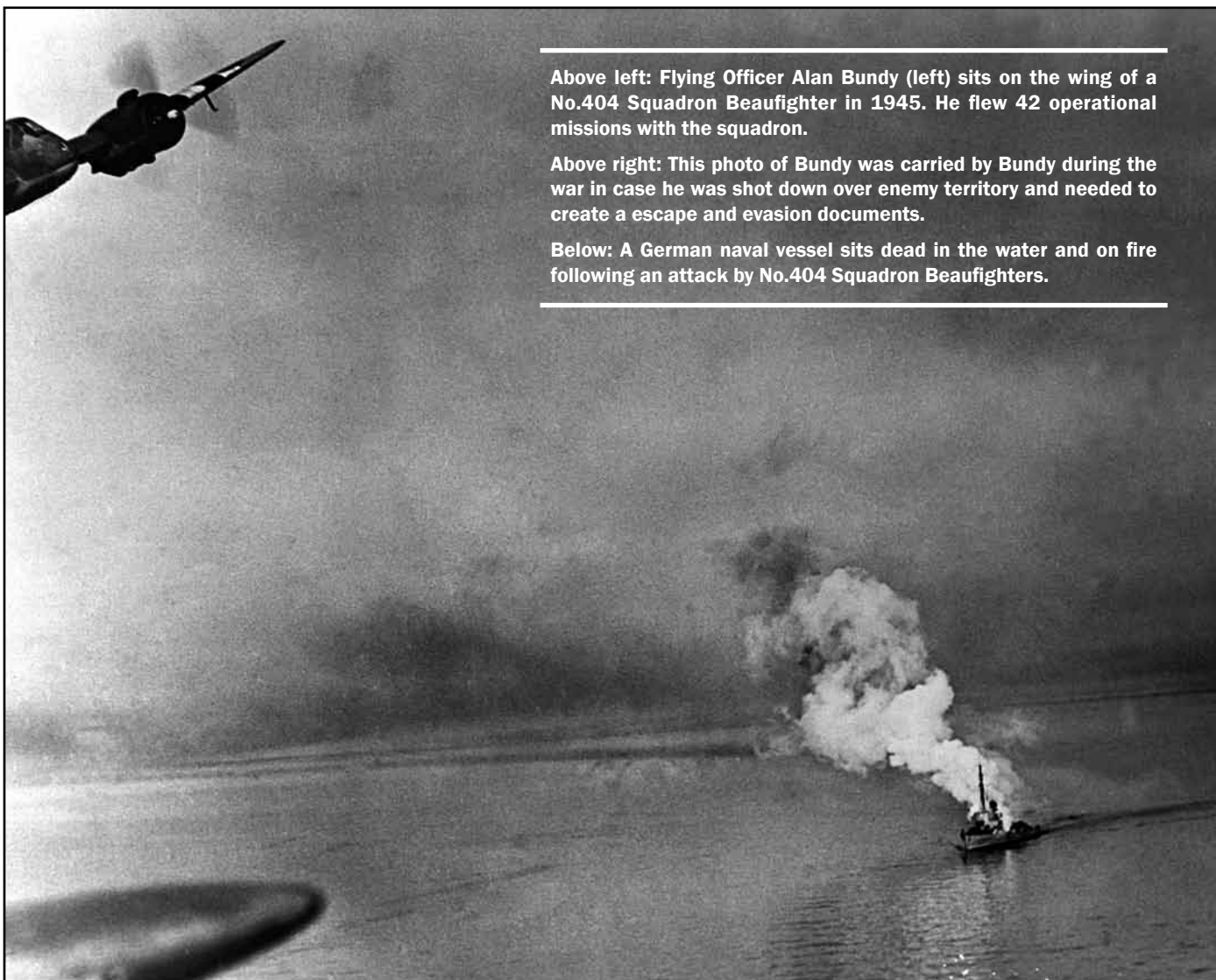
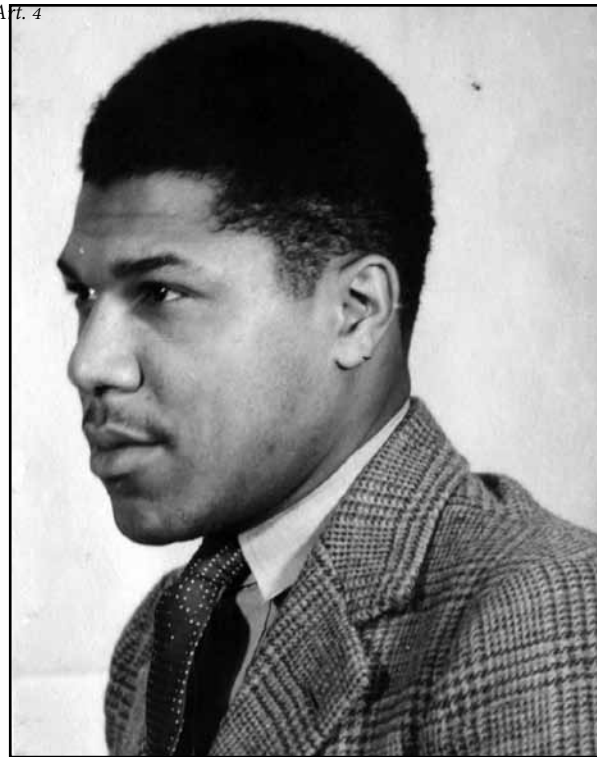
**Abstract: This article examines the recruitment policy of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and the perspectives of black volunteers during the Second World War. The author discusses the colour line employed by the RCAF, the discriminatory beliefs of some recruiting officers, and the motivations behind the acceptance of black recruits. The author argues the fear that "racial differences" would cause animosity within the ranks was a large barrier for black recruits and a central reason why groundcrew duty was encouraged. However, the growing demand for manpower forced the RCAF to relax its policy and enlist all qualified applicants, regardless of skin colour.**

fly only solo fighter missions, Edward "Lefty" Wright, a white sergeant from Midland, Ontario, agreed to fly with him. On their first sortie together on 15 October 1944, they helped sink the 1202-ton Norwegian tanker *Inger Johanne* and the 426-ton German Auxiliary Trawler *VP.1605 Mosel* off the coast of Norway.<sup>2</sup> Bundy flew a Bristol Beaufighter on more than 40 operational missions.<sup>3</sup>

While there have been critical studies of the Aboriginal, Chinese, Mennonite, and Ukrainian Canadian experiences, the black<sup>4</sup> experience during the Second World War remains largely uncharted territory.<sup>5</sup> The principal assumption behind this relative lack of attention is that,

because of their small population, the black experience was not representative or relevant.<sup>6</sup> This conclusion suggests that the valiant wartime efforts and significant struggles of blacks to serve do not contribute to our understanding of either the conflict or of Canadian society.

This lack of attention to the Second World War exists even within the realm of black Canadian historiography. If the wartime experience is acknowledged at all, it is brief. The few existing accounts conclude that the war helped blacks integrate into society but provide few specifics to support this contention. Robin Winks' seminal work, *The Blacks in Canada*, first published in 1971, simply noted that "on both the war and the home fronts, the Negro's position improved."<sup>7</sup> In a comprehensive review of academic and popular histories of black Canadians in Atlantic Canada, historian Harvey A. Whitfield argued that historians have narrowly focused on the black Canadian experience and that there is especially "a gap between the early years of the 20th century and the Africville saga of the 1960s." Tellingly, Whitfield makes almost no mention of military history in his review.<sup>8</sup> When discrimination and the use of restrictive policies against blacks are acknowledged in sources,



Above left: Flying Officer Alan Bundy (left) sits on the wing of a No.404 Squadron Beaufighter in 1945. He flew 42 operational missions with the squadron.

Above right: This photo of Bundy was carried by Bundy during the war in case he was shot down over enemy territory and needed to create a escape and evasion documents.

Below: A German naval vessel sits dead in the water and on fire following an attack by No.404 Squadron Beaufighters.

"progress" is still considered to be have been made because the formal segregation seen in the military during the First World War was not implemented in the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> While official segregation may have come to an end, discriminatory recruitment policies still profoundly affected black volunteers.

This study seeks to partially fill that gap by examining the recruitment policy of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and the perspectives of black volunteers in order to analyze the experience of black Canadians during the Second World War.

From 1939 to 1942, the recruitment policy regarding black applicants was inconsistent and obscure. The RCAF's "Colour Line" policy in 1939 was that all volunteers had to be "British subjects and of pure European descent."<sup>10</sup> Black Canadians, regardless of how long they had lived in Canada or of how recently they had emigrated from the British West Indies or elsewhere in the Empire, were not viewed as being "of Pure European Descent." A prime example of how the policy functioned in practice comes from November 1939. The officer in charge (OIC) at the RCAF's Hamilton recruiting centre, Flying Officer O.S. Dunn, wrote to the secretary of National Defence regarding the recruitment of a "coloured" volunteer to work as a steward. The unnamed 6-foot, 1-inch and 185-pound black volunteer, who had worked as a steward on ships as well as a railway porter, was "an exceptionally clean cut and honest appearing young man, 29 years old, with excellent references."<sup>11</sup> Dunn felt that based upon his qualifications, and the fact that there was "no particular quota for this type," an opening should be made for him. However, at headquarters Flying Officer J.H. Hollies ruled that it was best that "the 'colour-line' be drawn in the applicant's own interest."<sup>12</sup> In other words, to avoid any possible racial

animosity from whites, the RCAF rejected a qualified black applicant who wished to serve. The official reply to Dunn's correspondence, signed by Hollies for the chief of the air staff, reiterated that applicants "must be of pure European descent with the exception of the North American Indians." Dunn was also informed that the applicant was to be advised of this ruling and that it "would apply to all Asiatics as well as to coloured applicants."<sup>13</sup> While this ruling was clear, the RCAF's recruiting policy was much more ambiguous in 1940.

In May 1940, the recruitment office in Vancouver was told that there was no "restriction in K.R. (Air) [King's Regulations and Orders for the Royal Canadian Air Force] in regard to enlistment on the grounds that the applicant is not of pure European descent." The criteria for enlistment were supposed to be the successful completion of trade tests and a satisfactory medical examination.<sup>14</sup>

Two months later, Gordon B. Isnor, Liberal Member of Parliament for Halifax, brought the issue of black recruitment to the attention of Parliament. He questioned whether the Department of National Defence assumed that all blacks were "illiterate, flat-footed and barbarian people who cannot be disciplined, who will run at the first sound of a rifle or the first sight of the enemy's bayonet." Furthermore, he wondered whether it was "because gentlemen in positions of high authority in the Department of National Defence have not come in contact with them, and do not appreciate that they are just as anxious to serve as their white brethren?" He implored Parliament to reject such false impressions of blacks and to give "serious thought" to recruiting them into service battalions.<sup>15</sup> In response to Isnor, the minister of national defence for air, Charles Power,

denied that a discriminatory policy was being employed and insisted that there was "no legal bar" preventing blacks from serving in the military. Likewise, he argued that, despite the fact that the air force regulations stated that only people of "Pure and European descent" were acceptable, this regulation was not actually enforced because he was aware that one particular black applicant had been permitted to enlist. Finally, he claimed that "there are coloured people in all branches of the service."<sup>16</sup>

A week after Isnor's comments in the House of Commons, Air Force Manning Order 10/22 was released which stressed to all the commanding officers (COs) and staff at Recruiting Centres not to let Canadian-born applicants of foreign-origin feel discriminated against "because of their racial descent." Furthermore, it emphasized that any Canadian-born applicant "must not be refused the privilege of submitting an application."<sup>17</sup> The manning order caused some confusion among recruiters about whether non-white volunteers should be accepted.

In November 1940, Flight Lieutenant A.A. Harcourt-Vernon, then the commanding officer of the Halifax RCAF Recruiting Centre, wrote to headquarters to clarify the details of the enlistment policy since "there are Airmen now serving who are not of pure European descent."<sup>18</sup> He was informed by Group Captain J.L.E.A. de Niverville that the requirement for pure European descent remained unchanged.<sup>19</sup> Eight months later, Harcourt-Vernon again inquired about the K.R. (Air) policy. He made reference to an unnamed black grade 12 student from Halifax who had been told by Ottawa that there was "no regulation against the enlistment of coloured persons." Nevertheless, although no reference to race was made to the applicant, it was suggested to him that he apply to the Army instead.<sup>20</sup> Despite de



**Charles Power, the minister of national defence for air, was a Canadian nationalist who denied the existence of racism in RCAF recruiting and presided over the removal of restrictive regulations and policies.**

Niverville's ruling, it was evident that the policy was not clear and that recruiting officers were using their own discretion.

For example, Alvin Duncan from Oakville, Ontario, was turned down on two separate occasions. With knowledge of radio technology, as well as experience in the militia as a member of The Lorne Scots, Duncan went to the RCAF recruiting centre in Toronto in 1940. After taking the aptitude test, the recruiting officers told him that he had failed. When he took the same aptitude test at a recruiting office in Hamilton the next day, Duncan gave the same answers. This time he was told that he had passed and was welcomed

into the RCAF. Shortly after his acceptance, the medical officer in Hamilton informed Duncan that he could not serve because he had a health condition – his heart was on the wrong side. Understandably suspicious of the diagnosis, Duncan, along with his commanding officer, went back to see the medical officer. After this meeting, he was reinstated into the RCAF because, as Duncan wryly recalled, "my heart was in the right spot, I guess." Finally accepted as a member of the air force, he went on to serve throughout the war as a radar mechanic.<sup>21</sup>

While 5,000 Canadians served in the same capacity as Duncan, only two others were black. One of them

was Sam Estwick from Sydney, Nova Scotia. Estwick, who was born in Barbados, sought to join the RCAF in Halifax in 1940. The recruiting officer informed him that he could not "trust a man of colour." Despite his background as a radio mechanic and electrical engineer, Estwick was told that he would never become a pilot.<sup>22</sup> In February 1941, he received an official response from the RCAF that claimed that "there does not appear to be any trade or category for which you would be suited." Estwick wrote to his Member of Parliament, Clarence Gillis of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation party, who queried the air minister, Charles Power. Power replied, as he had to Isnor, the Halifax MP, a year before that there were "no regulations existing at the present time which will debar any coloured person from service in the RCAF."<sup>23</sup> Months after the first refusal, the RCAF said it would accept Estwick but only as a waiter or for other unskilled "general duty" trades. Estwick was determined to be treated fairly. The air force finally recognized something of his potential in December 1941 when he was offered a place in the RCAF's radar school. He excelled in training and went on to serve in India, Libya, Egypt, and Britain. Indeed, he was offered the opportunity to apply for aircrew, but turned it down because he had become enthralled with radar work. After the war, he continued to serve in the RCAF's telecommunications branch and was commissioned in 1955, retiring as a flight lieutenant in 1963.<sup>24</sup>

This inconsistency in the RCAF's recruiting policy was challenged by the black community. The Reverend Dr. Charles H. Este, pastor of the Montreal-based Union Church, the only all-black United Church in Canada, was determined to find out whether there was a barrier to the enlistment of black recruits as Air Force pilots.<sup>25</sup> In May 1941, in an unsigned letter written on behalf

of defence minister J.L. Ralston, Reverend Este was informed that there had been "no barrier to the enlistment of a Negro in certain categories in the Air Force." The department stated that every case had to be considered carefully to be sure that blacks could handle the inequality that they would face. Nevertheless, the RCAF was pondering "a certain latitude with regard to the enlistment of the coloured race which should prove mutually beneficial." The letter acknowledged the patriotism and enthusiasm of Reverend Este's "people" and maintained that "many opportunities will be given to them to serve in our united cause."<sup>26</sup>

It was evident that the Department of National Defence was trying to avoid any charges of racial discrimination. When the story of R.T. de la Rosa reached the desk of the air officer commanding, No.1 Training Command, Toronto, military officials frantically tried to quell controversy. In the summer of 1941 de la Rosa applied to the Department of Labour for entry into the Galt Aircraft School. The school provided qualifications for enlistment in the RCAF, and had become so popular that schedules had to be extended that summer to accommodate additional classes.<sup>27</sup> Once de la Rosa presented himself at the recruiting centre in Hamilton and the staff realized he was black, they told him to report back to the Department of Labour and Mr. Simmons who had managed his original application. Simmons tried to dissuade de la Rosa from continuing, but the latter's father intervened to ask if a colour line existed. Fearing that the "father [was] determined to make an issue of this matter" and thus to provide harmful publicity, Squadron Leader O.S. Dunn recommended that the matter be dealt with urgently. In Dunn's opinion, de la Rosa should bypass the Galt Aircraft School and be accepted directly into the RCAF as an aero-engine mechanic.<sup>28</sup>



Photo courtesy Mathias Joost

**Sergeant Reginald Taylor de la Rosa's official RCAF photograph. Sergeant de la Rosa enlisted on 18 August 1941 in Toronto as an aero engine mechanic. He was one of the few Black-Canadians who were able to enlist prior to the lifting of the colour barrier. He later retrained as a flight engineer.**

In October 1941 Wing Commander H.P. Crabb, deputy director of manning in the personnel branch at headquarters, issued a letter to all recruiting offices regarding "Orientals and Negro applicants" in order to clarify policy, which had evidently been ignored or misunderstood. This circular clearly stated that "[n]otwithstanding the regulations in K.R. (Air), only those of European descent will be accepted for appointment or enlistment in Aircrew." However, so long as Asian

and black applicants were British subjects, they could not be barred from enlistment for any ground duties positions. Recruiting officers and staff were instructed to be frank about this general policy. Crabb also stressed that any recommendation of a black or Asian applicant should be made with the recognition that the applicant "will be greatly outnumbered by white personnel." Ultimately, they should be of a high standard because "[a]ctually the Air Force does not want coloured

personnel because of the difficulties of racial differences." Recruiting officers were not granted the authority to accept the applicants. Instead, all applications were to be sent to headquarters, and if an applicant was refused, recruiters were ordered to not mention race but to state that they lacked "the qualifications required for this category."<sup>29</sup>

In order to enforce this decision, it was decided in November 1941 that all aircrew applicants were to appear before a selection board prior to enlistment. This board was composed of three officers; interviewing, educational, and medical. The interviewing officer was to be the first contact for the applicant and to check, among other things, his personal history, general suitability, and racial origin. The subsequent forms which were to be used by the board and attached to enlistment documents included the field "racial origin."<sup>30</sup> The Record of Service Airmen form also included the field "racial origin."<sup>31</sup> Although there are no official statistics on how many blacks served in the Canadian military during the Second World War, according to the national census of 1941, there were 22,174 blacks in Canada, approximately 0.2 percent of the total population. Based upon the breakdown of the "Negro" population by age, there were 4,691 black males between the ages of 15 and 44, roughly the population eligible for military service.<sup>32</sup>

The restriction on black aircrew lasted until March 1942,<sup>33</sup> when the service was beginning a major expansion of both the home and overseas forces that had been recently approved by the Cabinet.<sup>34</sup> On 31 March 1942, Crabb, now director of manning at headquarters and promoted to the rank of group captain, sent a letter to all recruiting officers on behalf of the chief of the air staff which cancelled the orders issued on 7 October 1941 that prevented "Oriental and Negro"



Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum Archives



Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum Archives

**Gerry Bell was one of two Black-Canadians to serve in the RCAF prior to the Second World War. He enlisted as a sergeant-pilot in 1931 and served as a flight instructor for No.6 RCAF Bomber Group in England during the war.**

applicants from being appointed or enlisted to aircrew. Furthermore, applications from blacks were no longer to be sent to headquarters. Instead, applications were to go before a selection board and the final authority rested with the CO at the particular recruiting office. While the restriction was relaxed, Crabb stipulated that members of the selection board should take the utmost care in determining an applicant's suitability. Crabb once again stressed

that a "coloured applicant will be the sole representative of his race in the Unit." He also hypothesized that a university graduate applying for aircrew would be more likely to "orient himself to Service conditions" rather than be "embarrassed" at training school. If an applicant was not successful, he was to be told by the commanding officer who in turn could suggest to the applicant that they apply to the Army or Navy. No inference of race as a factor in selection was to be made under any circumstances. Lastly, the new policy still asserted that coloured female applicants were "not to be encouraged" to apply to the RCAF Women's Division, the newly-formed female air force service.<sup>35</sup>

Two weeks after Crabb sent this letter to all recruiting stations, he prepared a press release stating that there were no restrictions against blacks in the RCAF. In a memorandum to the air member for personnel, however, Crabb asserted that his directorate was "firmly opposed to any publicity on the subject of the enlistment of coloured applicants." In the directorate's opinion, publicity would not serve any purpose and it could potentially create "a flood of undesirable applications."<sup>36</sup> Crabb's advice seems to have been accepted, for the press release was never used. The draft copy stated that all applicants, whether for the RCAF, Army or Navy, were given the same opportunity as anyone else and that only an individual's health and educational qualifications determined acceptability. The draft press release also stated that, while a number of black applicants had claimed they were rejected because of racial discrimination, it was actually because they, along with many white applicants, did not meet these essential educational or medical requirements.<sup>37</sup>

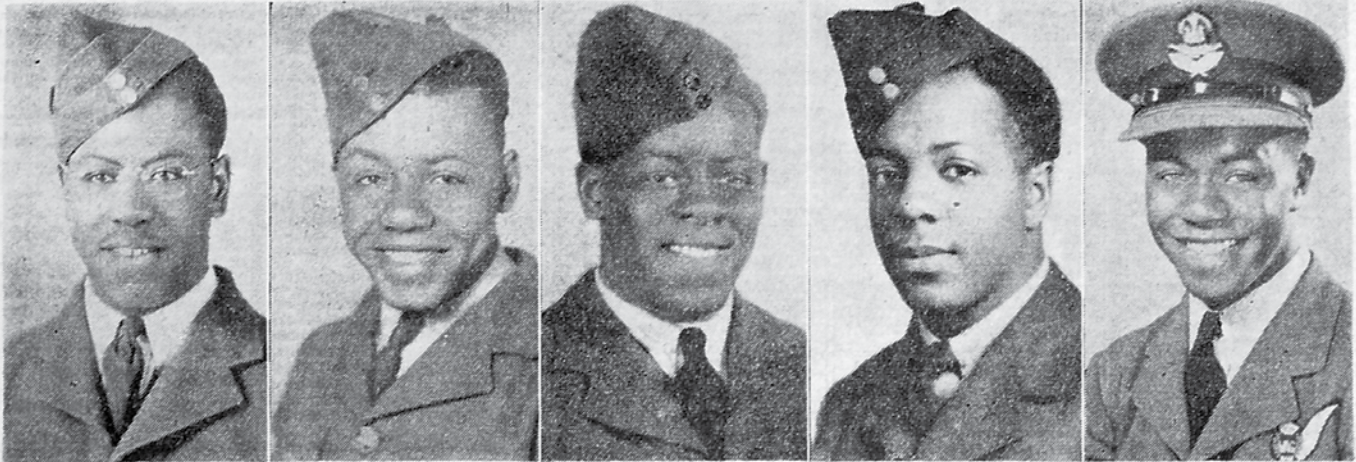
In the space of a few months, the RCAF moved from discouraging to encouraging black recruits. The



# The Evening Times-Globe

SAINT JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, MAY 19, 1945

## Carty Family Has Enviably War Record



**A**DOLPHUS, a flight sergeant, is an airframe mechanic, enlisted in the R.C.A.F. in September, 1939, serving in Saint John, Halifax, Dartmouth, St. John's, Que., and Deseronto, Ont., where he is now serving. Prior to his enlistment he was on the staff of the Boys' Industrial Home.

**W**ILLIAM (Bill), a flight sergeant, is an aeronautical inspector, enlisted in September, 1939, serving at Saint John, Fingal, Ont., Technical Training School in Toronto, Moncton, Clarke Ruse Aircraft Ltd., at Dartmouth, then returning to No. 5 Equipment Depot at Moncton where he is now stationed.

**C**LYDE, an LAC, is a fire fighter, enlisted in 1942, was stationed at St. Thomas, Ont., Prince Edward Island, and Dartmouth where he is now serving. Before enlisting Clyde was employed by J. Marcus and Co., also took a keen interest in art, and many stations have much of his work displayed on their walls.

**D**ONALD, an AC2, is an equipment assistant. Enlisted in the R.C.A.F. in May, 1942. He has served in Toronto, Winnipeg, Brandon, Man., Mountain View, Ont., and Debert, where he is now stationed. Before enlisting Don was at Saint John Vocational School.

**G**ERALD, a pilot officer, enlisted in the R.C.A.F. in September, 1942. He received his commission at Mountain View, Ont., July 23, 1944, as a wireless air gunner. He went overseas in September, 1944. Prior to enlistment Gerry was a student of the Saint John Vocational School.

**T**HESE young men are sons of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Carty, 22 Courtney Street. Mr. and Mrs. Carty have two other boys at home, Robert and Malcolm, who are members of the Army Cadets and Air Cadets, respectively. Their father served in the First Great War as a senior non-commissioned officer. An uncle, Seymour Tyler, was a sergeant in the First Great War.

**The Carty family of Saint John, New Brunswick contributed five sons to the war effort. The four eldest sons served in various capacities in Canada, while the youngest son, Gerald, flew 35 missions over Europe as a wireless air gunner with Bomber Command.**

Directorate of Public Relations for the RCAF requested to be informed of any incidents against "dark-skinned airmen" during their training in Canada. Plans were underway to start a press campaign to "prepare the public of Canada for the advent of larger numbers of dark-skinned trainees." After an incident at No.1 Training Command, Toronto, where a "Sergeant Pilot from Malaya was subjected to humiliation because of the colour of his skin," the directorate wanted to offset any negative stories.<sup>38</sup> Stories were planted by the military via the Canadian Press wire service that focused on the opportunities available to black

Canadians interested in joining the air force. One centred on Lloyd Perry of Chatham, Ontario, who was scheduled to enter the air force on 5 November 1942. A law student and track star at Wayne University in Detroit, Perry was reported to be the "first Canadian negro scheduled for training as a pilot in the RCAF."<sup>39</sup> Gerry Bell of Hamilton, however, was credited as being the first black Canadian to earn a pilot's licence.

Bell, who was born in Hamilton in 1909 and studied medicine at the University of Western Ontario, completed his flying lessons at the Mount Hope Airport in Hamilton in 1929. He initially enlisted in the RCAF

in 1931 as an airman pilot.<sup>40</sup> After leaving the air force to pursue athletic careers in both sprinting and boxing, he returned to the RCAF in 1936. Prior to the war, he served with No. 19 (Bomber) Squadron (Auxiliary), a reserve unit, in Hamilton and was a flying instructor at the Hamilton Aero Club. During the Second World War, he served four years as a pilot instructor with No.6 Bomber Group in Yorkshire, England. Bell continued to serve in the military until 1961 when he retired at age 52 with the rank of warrant officer.<sup>41</sup>

Another story concerned the Carty family from New Brunswick. Albert Carty of Saint John was a



veteran of the First World War, having served with the No.2 Construction Battalion. Although he was too old to serve again in 1939, his family was more than willing to represent him. By the end of the Second World War, all seven of Albert Carty's sons had joined the military. Five saw active service with the air force. The first Carty to enlist was Adolphous, who was accepted by the RCAF on 10 September 1939 and rose to become a master aero engine mechanic with the rank of flight sergeant. His brother William served as an aeronautical inspector. Clyde, who originally enlisted in the Army's coastal artillery, later became a fire fighter in the RCAF. Donald was an equipment assistant. Gerald enlisted in September 1942 and at the age of 19 was promoted to the rank of flight lieutenant, becoming one of the youngest commissioned officers in the RCAF. He flew over 35 sorties in Vickers Wellington and Avro Lancaster bombers.<sup>42</sup>

With the racial barriers seemingly removed, Lincoln Alexander joined the RCAF in 1942 because he was not "keen" on serving in the army and the navy was the least "interested in having blacks."<sup>43</sup> Due to his poor vision, he was initially trained as a wireless operator (ground) in Hamilton and Guelph, Ontario and Lachine, Quebec. He spent the majority of his service working in communications and flying training missions at the No. 7 Air Observer School in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba which was part of the BCATP. Although he did not have any negative race-related experience with his compatriots, Alexander recalled that, for at least one person, he was "the first black person he'd ever seen."<sup>44</sup> He achieved the rank of corporal and was honorably discharged in 1945.<sup>45</sup> In 1968 he became the first black elected to Canada's House of Commons. He later served as the minister of labour

in Joe Clark's government and then as lieutenant-governor of Ontario from 1985 to 1991.<sup>46</sup>

The policy changes made in March 1942 remained throughout the rest of the war. In fact, it was not until early 1946 that the RCAF reinstated the requirement that all applications from blacks, "Orientals" and "former enemy aliens" had to be forwarded to headquarters for approval, thus removing discretion from local recruiters.<sup>47</sup> According to the chief of the air staff, there were still no restrictions placed upon the eligibility of "coloured applicants." The justification for having the applications sent to headquarters was so that they could "carefully scrutinize" the candidate and determine whether the applicant could "mix" with whites, a practice also portrayed as being "for the protection and future welfare of the applicant."<sup>48</sup> This process was still employed by the RCAF in 1956.<sup>49</sup>

The recruitment of non-whites prior to 1943 created a great deal of confusion within the RCAF. While the colour-line employed by the RCAF and the discriminatory beliefs of some recruiting officers prevented willing and capable Canadians from enlisting, some applicants, such as Gerry Bell and Adolphous Carty, were accepted in the early stages of the war without any problems. This was the result of recruiting officers ignoring the policy and RCAF officials not wanting to make exclusionary policies obvious to the general public. So, applications were accepted and recruiters were ordered never to cite race as a reason for the rejection of a candidate. The fear that "racial differences" would cause animosity was a large barrier for black recruits and a large reason why the least skilled "general duty" trades, ones that did not involve membership in aircrews or the ground crew teams who serviced aircraft, were encouraged.

The growing demand for manpower forced the RCAF to relax its policy and consider all qualified applicants, regardless of skin colour. In the end, the experiences of black veterans, such as Sam Estwick and Alan Bundy, reveal that black Canadians overcame both official and unofficial discrimination in the RCAF during the Second World War.

## Notes

1. *The Toronto Star*, 20 January 1989, p.A16.
2. The 404 Squadron, RCAF, October 1944, <<http://www.404squadron.com/Oct1944.html>>; Bridglal Pachai and Henry Bishop, *Images of Our Past: Historic Black Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Nimbus, 2006), p.92; Calvin Ruck, *The Black Battalion, 1916-1920: Canada's Best Kept Military Secret* (Halifax: Nimbus, 1987), pp.72-73; Jim Bates, Mathias Joost, Terry Higgins and Dave O'Malley, *Black Buffalo: The Story of Flying Officer Allen Selwyn Bundy, The First Black Combat Pilot in the RCAF*, <<http://www.vintagewings.ca/VintageNews/Stories/tabid/116/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/342/language/en-CA/Black-Buffalo.aspx>>.
3. Major Chris Larsen, "African History Month – Flying Officer Allan Bundy, 404 (Buffalo) Squadron," 17 February 2011, <<http://www.airforce.forces.gc.ca/14w-14e/nr-sp/index-eng.asp?id=11503>>
4. The term black, as opposed to African Canadian, is used here because of its link to skin colour and because contemporaries made no distinction between blacks from Africa, the Caribbean, the United States, or Canada.
5. Examples of these studies include: Thomas M. Prymak, *Maple Leaf and Trident: The Ukrainian Canadians during the Second World War* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1988); Peter Lorenz Neufeld, *Mennonites at War, a Double-Edged Sword: Canadian Mennonites in World War Two* (Deloraine, MB: DTS Publishing, 1997); Marjorie Wong, *The Dragon and the Maple Leaf: Chinese Canadians in World War II* (London, ON: Pirie Publishing, 1994); R. Scott Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).
6. See, for example, Brereton Greenhous et al., *The Crucible of War, 1939-1945: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Volume III* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and the Department of National Defence, 1994), p.xxiv.
7. Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*. Second Edition (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), p.421.

8. See Harvey A. Whitfield, "Reviewing Blackness in Atlantic Canada and the African Canadian Diaspora," *Acadiensis* 37 no.2 (Summer/Autumn 2008), pp.130-9.
9. See Ruck, *The Black Battalion*, pp.70-73; Bridglal Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land: The Survival of Nova Scotia Blacks, Volume 2, 1800-1989* (Halifax: Black Educators Association, 1990), p.197; Dennis and Leslie McLaughlin, *For My Country: Black Canadians on the Field of Honour* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2004), pp.35-8.
10. Directorate of History and Heritage [DHH], RCAF "Colour Line" Policy, 75/347, 25-04-1939; A.F.G.O.15/1939 King's Regulations and Orders for the Royal Canadian Air Force, 1924-Permanent and Auxiliary – (Amendment No. 13), *The Canada Gazette* 72.48 (May 27, 1939), p.2812.
11. Library and Archives Canada [LAC], RG 24, vol.3307, H.Q. 282-1-2 v.2, Flying Officer O.S. Dunn to secretary, Department of National Defence [DND], 11 November 1939.
12. *Ibid.*, the marginalia of this letter includes the statement made by Hollies that the "colour-line" should be drawn as well as the note that "Pure European descent" is to apply.
13. LAC, RG 24, vol.3307, H.Q. 282-1-2 v.2, Flying Officer J.H. Hollies to OIC Montreal Recruiting Centre, 18 November 1939.
14. LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, vol.298, file 304-117, letter 6496, Group Captain A.T. Cowley to CO, Vancouver Recruiting Centre, 1 May 1940.
15. House of Commons, *Debates*, 31 July 1940, pp.2208-9.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Emphasis in original. This manning order came in response to pressure from Canadian-born RCAF applicants of Slavic and other foreign origin. LAC, RG 24, vol.3302, file 280-1-2 pt. 1, AFMO M.10/22.
18. LAC, RG 24, vol.3309, file 282-1-2, pt.5, Flight Lieutenant A.A. Harcourt-Vernon, CO, RCAF Recruiting Centre, Halifax, to secretary, DND for Air, 15 November 1940.
19. *Ibid.*, Group Captain J.L.E.A. de Niverville, for chief of the air staff, to Flight Lieutenant A.A. Harcourt-Vernon, CO, RCAF Recruiting Centre, Halifax, 6 December 1940.
20. LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, vol.298, file 304-117, Harcourt-Vernon to de Niverville, 6 June 1941.
21. *The Toronto Star*, 6 June 1997, p.A21.
22. *The Globe and Mail*, 2 May 2008, p.S9.
23. The letter from Power to Gillis was written in May 1941, *The Globe and Mail*, 2 May 2008, p.S9.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Rev. F. Gabourel, "Charles Humphry Este Will Never Be Forgotten By Montreal Blacks," *The Montreal Oracle* 2, no.1 (20 January 1977); Dorothy W. Williams, *Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997), pp.54, 84; Clifton Ruggles and Olivia Rovinescu, *Outsider Blues: A Voice from the Shadows* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1996), p.73.
26. LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, vol.298, file 304-117, DND to the Rev. Charles H. Este, 8 May 1941.
27. There were 882 applicants that summer and the majority of graduates were to enlist at the recruiting centre in Hamilton. LAC, RG 24, vol.3309, file 282-1-2, pt.5, Wing Commander H. G. Richards for air officer commanding (AOC) No. 1 Training Command, to secretary, DND for Air, 11 August 1941; Group Captain W.A. Curtis for chief of the air staff to CO, RCAF Recruiting Centre, Hamilton, 16 August 1941.
28. LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, vol.298, file 304-117, Flying Officer O.S. Dunn, CO, RCAF Toronto Recruiting Centre to AOC, No.1 Training Command, 4 August 1941; Squadron Leader A. M. Duggan for AOC, No.1 Training Command to secretary, DND for Air, 4 August 1941.
29. *Ibid.*, Wing Commander H.P. Crabb to all recruiting centres, 7 October 1941; LAC, RG 24, Acc. 83-84/049, vol.1624, file 304-113, letter 45-12-1 (D. of M. 3), S.L. DeCarteret, deputy minister (air) to under-secretary of state for external affairs, 12 December 1941.
30. LAC, RG 24, vol.3302, file HQ 280-1-2, pt.2, Squadron Leader C. McNicoll, CO, No.13 Recruiting Centre, Montreal, to secretary, DND for Air, 14 November 1941.
31. *Ibid.*, Royal Canadian Air Force, Record of Service Airmen form.
32. Canada, *Eighth Census of Canada, Ethnic Origin and Nativity of the Canadian People* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1944).
33. Historian R. Scott Sheffield references a letter from Air Vice-Marshal J.A. Sully to Edwards and claims the "Air Service jettisoned the 'colour line' completely in September 1942." Unfortunately, this letter could not be found during the author's own research. See, R. Scott Sheffield, "'Of Pure European Descent and of the White Race': Recruitment Policy and Aboriginal Canadians, 1939-1945," *Canadian Military History* 5 no.1 (Spring 1996), p.11; Pachai and Bishop, *Images of Our Past*, p.92.
34. DHH, Historical Section (General Staff), "Manpower Problems of the Royal Canadian Air Force During the Second World War," Army Headquarters Report No. 67, 15 January 1954, pp. 17-18.
35. LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, vol.298, file 304-117, Group Captain H.P. Crabb to Vancouver Recruiting Centre, 31 March 1942.
36. *Ibid.*, copy of draft press release, 13 April 1942.
37. *Ibid.*, Group Captain H. P Crabb to Air Force Manning Personnel, 13 April 1942.
38. *Ibid.*, S.L. Tilley, 11 August 1942.
39. *Hamilton Spectator*, 30 October 1942.
40. Pat Patterson, "Gerald Bell: Pioneering African-Canadian Aviator," *Akili: The Journal of African Canadian Studies* 2 no. 3 (November 1994), pp. 1 and 3; Alessandro Erasmii, "Canada's First Black Airman: Gerry Bell," *Peace and War in the 20th Century* (McMaster University), <<http://pw20c.mcmaster.ca/case-study/canada-s-first-black-airman-gerry-bell>>.
41. *The Toronto Star*, 8 January 1986, p.A7 and 20 January 1989, p.A16.
42. *Evening Times Globe*, 19 May 1945, p.9; *The Clarion* 2, no.7 (15 April 1947); *The Telegraph Journal*, 13 March 2008, p.D10.
43. Lincoln M. Alexander, *Go to school, you're a little black boy: The Honourable Lincoln M. Alexander; a memoir*, Herb Shoveller, ed., (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2006), p.39.
44. *Ibid.*, p.40.
45. *Ibid.*, pp.39-41.
46. Donna Hill, ed., *A Black Man's Toronto 1914-1980: The Reminiscences of Harry Gairey* (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1981), pp.35.
47. LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, vol.298, file 304-117, Group Captain R.C. Ripley to Air Force Manning Personnel, 28 January, 1946; L.M. Wright to ACO, Vancouver, 14 February 1946.
48. *Ibid.*, Ledoux, for the chief of the air staff to J.G. Stephenson, AOC, Halifax, 8 October 1946.
49. *Ibid.*, R. S. Turnbull to AOC, Edmonton, 22 September 1950; Squadron Leader M.G. Bryan to CO, RCAF Recruiting Unit, Toronto, 18 July 1956.

Simon Theobald is a researcher with the historical research firm Joan Holmes and Associates, Inc. in Ottawa. This article is based on the work of his MA thesis which he conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jeffrey Keshen at the University of Ottawa. The author is grateful to the reviewers for their helpful criticisms and comments. He would also like to thank his brother, Andrew Theobald, for reading the early drafts and helping to flesh-out ideas. Any errors are his alone.